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(54) **OPTICAL MODULATOR**

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G02F 1/29 (2006.01)
G02B 26/08 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

USPC **359/279**; 359/298; 359/301

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See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The optical modulator includes an optical waveguide element in which a first waveguide is formed obliquely to an outgoing end surface, and a second waveguide is formed obliquely to both the first waveguide and the outgoing end surface, a lens which makes parallel optical paths of first and second modulated light beams outgoing from the first and second waveguides, a phase delay element which applies a phase delay to at least one of the first and second modulated light beams, a polarization beam rotating unit which rotates at least one polarized wave of the first and second modulated light beams to make the polarized waves orthogonal to each other between the two modulated light beams, and a polarization beam combining element which combines the first and second modulated light beams whose polarized waves are made orthogonal to each other.

5 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets

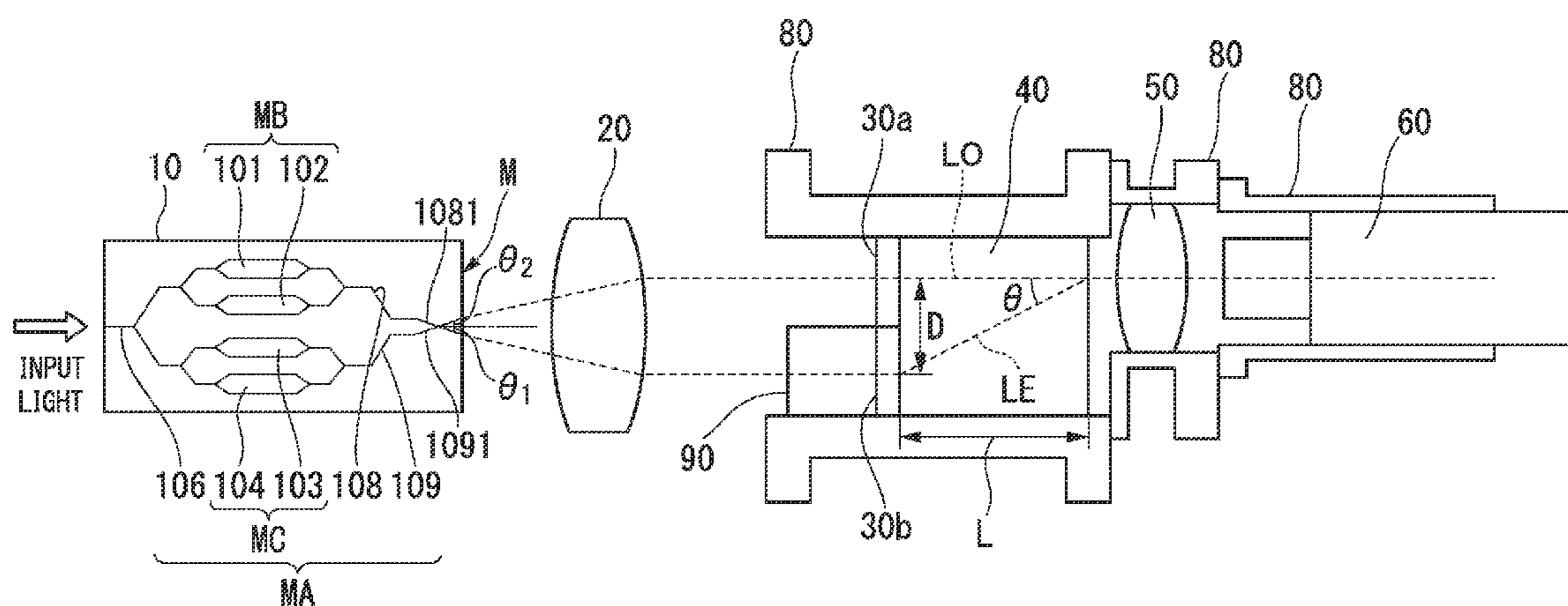


FIG. 1

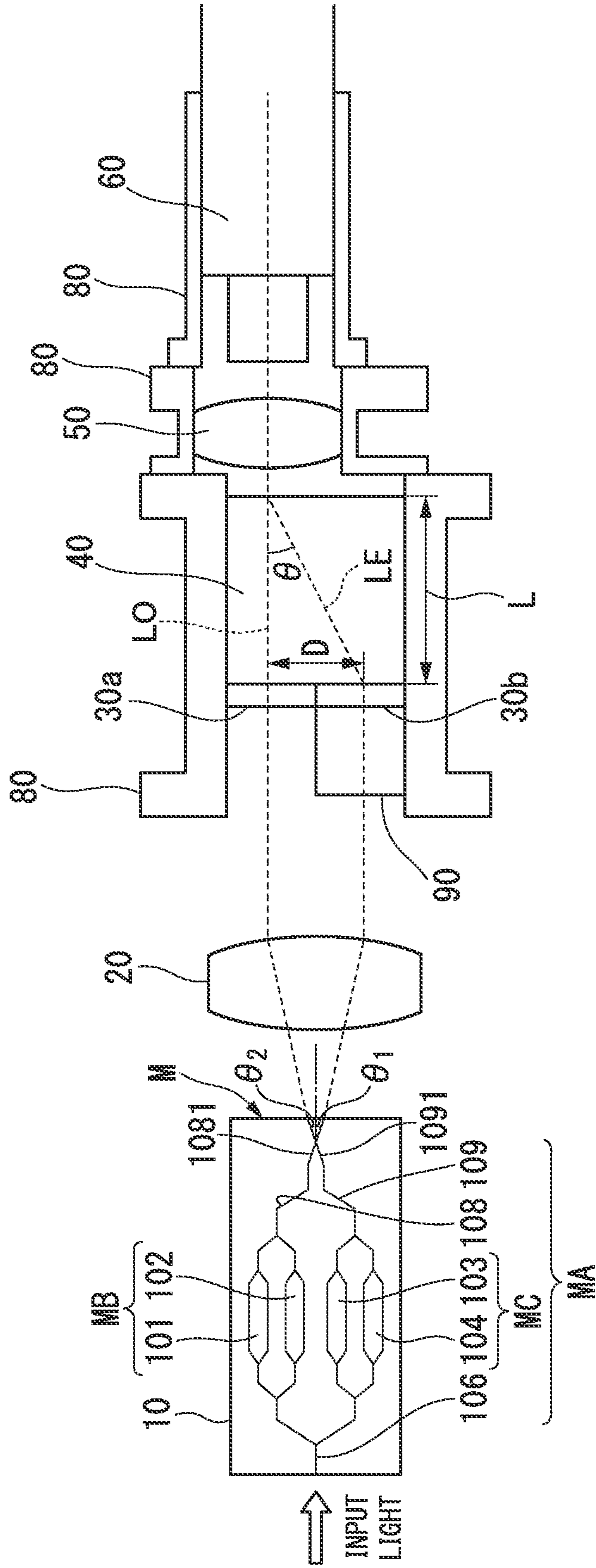
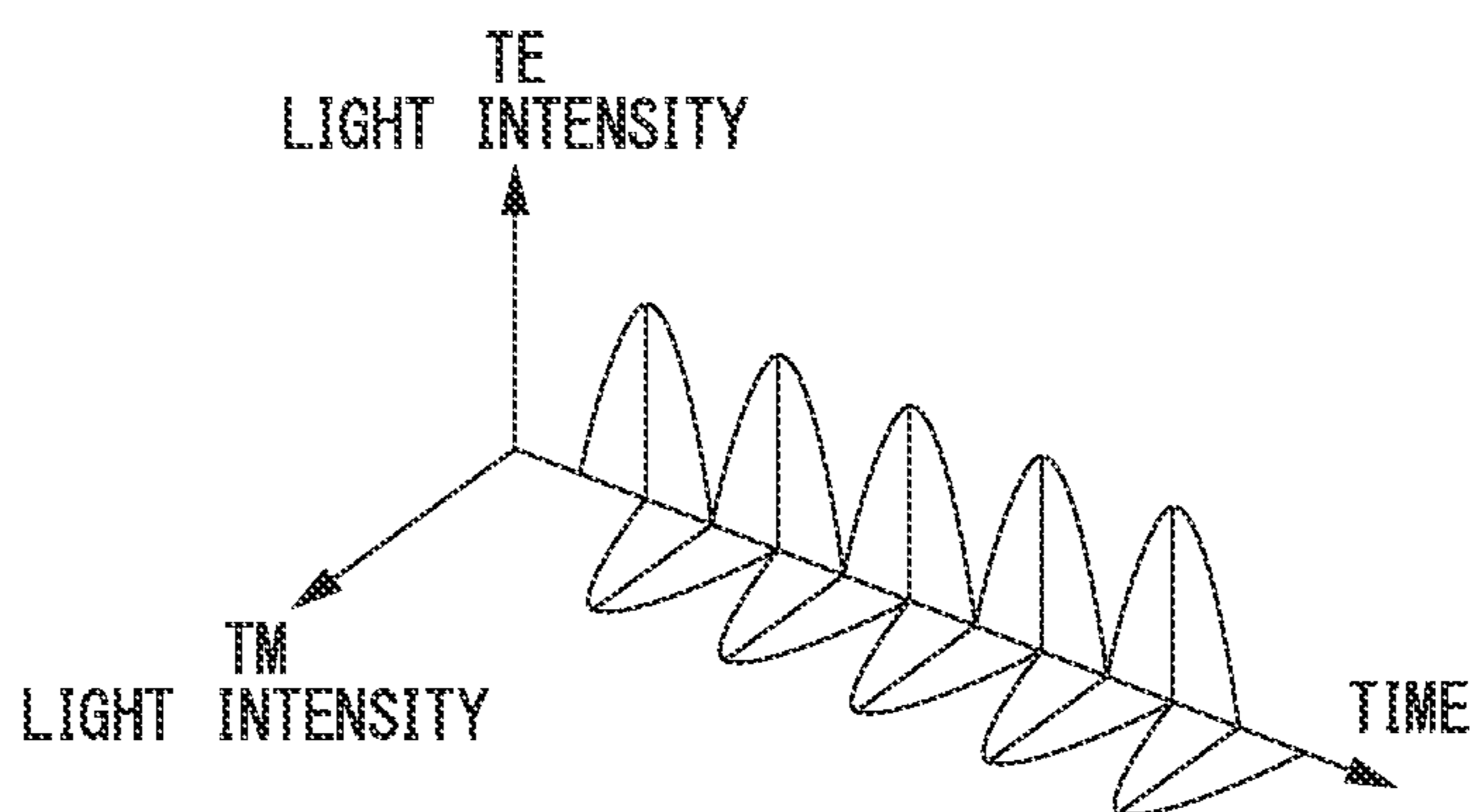


FIG. 2



1**OPTICAL MODULATOR**

This application claims the benefit of priority to Japanese Patent Application No. 2011-069333, filed 28 Mar. 2011, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an optical modulator.

BACKGROUND

As a transmission system which can increase a transmission capacity of an optical communication system, Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2001-036505 describes a system which makes polarized waves orthogonal to each other between light pulses corresponding to adjacent bits on a time axis, such that polarization multiplexing is used together with time-division multiplexing. Specifically, a multiplexing optical circuit described in Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2001-036505 is configured to make polarized waves of two separately modulated light beams orthogonal to each other, to apply a time delay half the pulse interval of each modulated light beam between the two modulated light beams, and to then perform polarization combine. According to this system, polarized waves are made orthogonal to each other between adjacent bits, such that interference of light pulses does not occur. For this reason, even if the waveforms of the light pulses temporally overlap, there is little influence on the transmission characteristics. Accordingly, it is possible to increase the transmission capacity without depending on a method of narrowing the light pulses.

In the configuration of Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2001-036505, only with the use of an optical path difference between two polarized waves (modulated light beams) in a birefringent crystal which performs polarization combine, the above-described time delay necessary for polarization multiplexing and time-division multiplexing is generated between the two modulated light beams. On the other hand, since the time delay is determined at the bit rate of the system, it is difficult to freely select the optical path difference in the birefringent crystal, consequently, the length (the crystal thickness in the light propagation direction) of the birefringent crystal. For this reason, it is necessary to use a comparatively large type as the birefringent crystal, causing a problem in that the apparatus may not be reduced in size.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention has been finalized in consideration of the above-described situation, and an object of the invention is to reduce the size of an optical modulator which makes polarized waves orthogonal to each other between light pulses corresponding to adjacent bits on a time axis.

The invention has been finalized in order to solve the above-described problem. An aspect of the invention provides an optical modulator which makes polarized waves orthogonal to each other between light pulses corresponding to adjacent bits on a time axis. The optical modulator includes first and second light modulation unit which are driven with the same modulation frequency, an optical waveguide element which has a first waveguide through which a first modulated light beam by the first light modulation unit propagates and a second waveguide through which a second modulated light beam by the second light modulation unit propagates, the first waveguide being formed obliquely to an outgoing

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end surface, and the second waveguide being formed obliquely to both the first waveguide and the outgoing end surface, a lens which makes parallel optical paths of the first modulated light beam outgoing from the first waveguide and the second modulated light beam outgoing from the second waveguide, a phase delay element which applies a phase delay to at least one of the first and second modulated light beams, a polarization beam rotating unit which rotates at least one polarized wave of the first and second modulated light beam to make the polarized waves orthogonal to each other between the two modulated light beams, and a polarization beam combining element which is provided at the back of the lens, and combines the first modulated light beam and the second modulated light beam whose polarized waves are made orthogonal to each other. The thickness of the phase delay element in the light propagation direction is set to a thickness at which a light pulse of the first modulated light beam and a light pulse of the second modulated light beam by a phase difference due to the phase delay element and a phase difference due to the polarization beam combining element are bit-interleaved.

In the optical modulator, the phase delay element may have a flat plate shape and may be configured to adjust the inclination angle of the normal of the flat plate relative to the light propagation direction.

In the optical modulator, the thickness of the polarization beam combining element in the light propagation direction may be set to be greater than a thickness corresponding to a minimum allowable value of polarization crosstalk on the combined beam between the first and second modulated light beams.

The optical modulator may further include a unit in which the optical waveguide element and the lens are fixed in a first housing, and a unit in which the phase delay element, the polarization beam rotating unit, and the polarization beam combining element are fixed in a second housing along with an output optical fiber.

The optical modulator may further include a unit in which the optical waveguide element, the polarization beam rotating unit, and the phase delay element are fixed in a first housing, and a unit in which the lens and the polarization beam combining element are fixed in a second housing along with an output optical fiber.

According to the aspect of the invention, it is possible to reduce the size of an optical modulator which makes polarized waves orthogonal to each other between light pulses corresponding to adjacent bits on the time axis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a top view showing the configuration of an optical modulator according to an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a diagram showing modulated light beams which are obtained from a polarization beam combining element and bit-interleaved with the planes of polarization thereof orthogonal to each other.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Hereinafter, an embodiment of the invention will be described in detail with reference to the drawings.

FIG. 1 is a top view showing the configuration of an optical modulator according to an embodiment of the invention. An optical modulator **1** is a polarization beam combining type modulator which polarizes and combines two modulated light beams. The optical modulator **1** has a modulator body **10** which modulates an input light beam, a lens **20** which colli-

mates light beams outgoing from the modulator body **10** and converts optical paths such that the optical axes are in parallel to each other, a phase delay element **90** which applies a phase delay to one of two light beams outgoing from the lens **20**, a half-wave plate **30a** which rotates the polarized wave of the other one of the two light beams (a light beam having not passed through the phase delay element **90**) outgoing from the lens **20**, a glass plate **30b** which has the same optical path length as the half-wave plate **30a**, a polarization beam combining element **40** which combines (performs polarization combine) light beams of different polarized waves outgoing from the half-wave plate **30a** and the glass plate **30b** such that the optical paths thereof are aligned with each other, a lens **50** which condenses the light beam outgoing from the polarization beam combining element **40** at an incident position of an output optical fiber **60**, and an output optical fiber **60** which extracts the combined light beam.

The modulator body **10** and the lens **20** are fixed in a housing **70**. The phase delay element **90**, the half-wave plate **30a**, the glass plate **30b**, the polarization beam combining element **40**, the lens **50**, and the output optical fiber **60** are accommodated in a cylindrical housing **80** and unitized.

The modulator body **10** is an optical waveguide element (LN optical modulator) in which an optical waveguide and a modulation electrode are formed on a lithium niobate (LiNbO_3 ; called LN) substrate.

The optical waveguide of the modulator body **10** has a nested structure in which Mach-Zehnder waveguides MB and MC are provided on both arms of a Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA, Mach-Zehnder waveguides **101** and **102** are provided on both arms of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MB, and Mach-Zehnder waveguides **103** and **104** are provided on both arms of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MC. That is, the input light beam to the modulator body **10** is introduced to an input waveguide **106** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA and branches off into the Mach-Zehnder waveguides MB and MC on the arms. Light input to the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MB branches off into the Mach-Zehnder waveguides **101** and **102**, and the light beam input to the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MC branches off into the Mach-Zehnder waveguides **103** and **104**. The output light beams from the Mach-Zehnder waveguides **101** and **102** are multiplexed by the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MB and introduced to an arm **108** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA. The output light beams from the Mach-Zehnder waveguides **103** and **104** are multiplexed by the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MC and introduced to an arm **109** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA.

The Mach-Zehnder waveguides **101** to **104** form an LN optical modulator along with the modulation electrodes provided therein. For example, a driving signal of 25 Gb/s is applied from a driving circuit (not shown) to the modulation electrodes of the LN optical modulators **101** to **104**, and the LN optical modulators **101** to **104** output modulated light beams which are modulated at 25 Gb/s. Here, as the modulation system of the LN optical modulators **101** and **102** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MB, DQPSK (differential quadri-phase shift keying) is used. The same applies to the modulation system of the LN optical modulators **103** and **104** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MC. With DQPSK, the light beams introduced to the arms **108** and **109** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA become modulated light beams of 50 Gb/s.

The arm **108** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA is provided such that a portion (output waveguide **1081**) near one end surface M of the LN substrate (modulator body **10**) is at an angle θ_1 relative to the normal to the end surface M. Similarly, the arm **109** of the Mach-Zehnder waveguide MA

is provided such that a portion (output waveguide **1091**) near the end surface M is at an angle θ_2 relative to the normal to the end surface M. The angles θ_1 and θ_2 are angles at which the arm **108** and the arm **109** intersect each other inside the LN substrate. With this waveguide arrangement, the light beam exited obliquely downward from the output waveguide **1081** in FIG. 1, and the light beam exited obliquely upward from the output waveguide **1091** in FIG. 1. The output waveguides **1081** and **1091** are provided obliquely to the end surface M, thereby reducing feedback light beams from the end surface M to the output waveguides **1081** and **1091**.

In the lens **20**, the focal length f_1 and the arrangement (the distance between the lens **20** and the outgoing end of each of the output waveguides **1081** and **1091**, and the optical axis direction of the lens **20**) such that two light beams outgoing from the output modulator body **10** (output waveguides **1081** and **1091**) are collimated and the propagation directions of the two light beams having passed through the lens **20** are parallel to each other. As described above, since the light beam incident on the lens **20** travels obliquely to the optical axis of the lens **20**, with the adjustment of the focal length f_1 and the arrangement of the lens **20**, it is possible to make outgoing light beams from the lens **20** parallel to each other. Therefore, a prism for converting an optical path is not necessary, thereby reduction in the number of components and reduction in size.

The focal length of the lens **20** is $f_1=1.8$ mm. The reason is as follows. If the focal length is long, (1) the distance between the modulator body **10** and the lens **20** is extended against the reduction in size and (2) the diameter of a collimated light beam increases, resulting in deterioration in polarization crosstalk described below. If the focal length is short, (3) the effective length when a light beam is regarded as a collimated light beam is shorter than the thickness L of the polarization beam combining element **40**, making it difficult to completely combine the outgoing light beams from the polarization beam combining element **40**.

The phase delay element **90** is arranged on the optical path of the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1081** from among the two parallel light beams having passed through the lens **20** (only the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1081** passes through the phase delay element **90**, and the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1091** does not pass through the phase delay element **90**). Accordingly, only the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1081** is given a phase delay according to the thickness (the length of the light propagation direction) of the phase delay element **90**.

The half-wave plate **30a** rotates the plane of polarization of the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1091** from among the two parallel light beams having passed through the lens **20** by 90° . The glass plate **30b** applies the same phase delay as the phase delay applied to the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1091** by the half-wave plate **30a** to the light beam outgoing from the output waveguide **1081** (the light beam having passed through the phase delay element **90**) (without changing the plane of polarization). Accordingly, the light beam outgoing from the half-wave plate **30a** and the light beam outgoing from the glass plate **30b** are in a state where the planes of polarization are orthogonal to each other (inclined at 90°).

The polarization beam combining element **40** is a birefringent medium (for example, rutile or calcite) which is formed in a flat plate shape. The polarization beam combining element **40** sets the direction of the optical axis such that the light beam which passes through the half-wave plate **30a** and is incident on the polarization beam combining element **40** (the

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outgoing light beam from the output waveguide **1091**) propagates through the polarization beam combining element **40** as a normal light beam LO, and the light beam which passes through the glass plate **30b** and is incident on the polarization beam combining element **40** (the outgoing light beam from the output waveguide **1081**) propagates through the polarization beam combining element **40** as an abnormal light beam LE. Accordingly, two light beams which are outgoing from the half-wave plate **30a** and the glass plate **30b** and incident at different incident positions of the polarization beam combining element **40** are outgoing on the same optical path.

A combined phase delay of the phase delay by the phase delay element **90** and the phase delay by the optical path difference in the polarization beam combining element **40** is generated between two light beams with polarized waves orthogonal to each other outgoing from the polarization beam combining element **40** on the same optical path. This phase delay (the combined phase delay of the two phase delays) is adjusted to a phase delay corresponding to half the time for one bit of the modulated light beam outgoing from each of the output waveguides **1081** and **1091**. Specifically, the thickness of the phase delay element **90** may be determined in accordance with the thickness of the polarization beam combining element **40** determined as described below such that the above condition (half-bit phase delay) is satisfied. In this way, in the optical modulator **1** of this embodiment, a half-bit delay is applied between the polarized waves outgoing from the polarization beam combining element **40** by both the phase delay element **90** and the polarization beam combining element **40**. Accordingly, modulated light beams of 100 Gb/s which are bit-interleaved from the modulated light beams of 50 Gb/s with the planes of polarization orthogonal to each other as shown in FIG. **5** are obtained from the polarization beam combining element **40**. With this configuration, since the phase delay applied by the polarization beam combining element **40** is small, it becomes possible to use a smaller polarization beam combining element **40**.

The lens **50** has a focal length f_2 , and condenses the light beam (collimated light beam) having passed through the polarization beam combining element **40** at the focal position. The output optical fiber **60** is arranged such that the core end surface on the incident side is at the focal position of the lens **50**. Accordingly, the light beam from the polarization beam combining element **40** is coupled to the output optical fiber **60**, combined and bit-interleaved, and a modulated light beam of 100 Gb/s is extracted to the outside as the output of the optical modulator **1**.

Next, a configuration for reducing the size of the optical modulator **1** and obtaining a satisfactory polarization crosstalk characteristic will be described.

In the optical modulator **1** of FIG. **1**, the propagation direction of the abnormal light beam LE propagating through the polarization beam combining element **40** is inclined at an angle θ according to the birefringence of the polarization beam combining element **40** (the difference between the refractive index n_o for the normal light beam and the refractive index n_e for the abnormal light beam) relative to the propagation direction of the normal light beam LO. At this time, if the clearance D between the two light beams (parallel light beams) with polarized waves orthogonal to each other and incident on the polarization beam combining element **40** from the half-wave plate **30a** and the glass plate **30b** is D (see FIG. **1**), the thickness L of the polarization beam combining element **40** (the length of the propagation direction of the normal light LO, see FIG. **1**) necessary when the two light beams pass through the polarization beam combining element **40** and exit onto the same optical path (that is, perform

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polarization combine) is expressed by $L=D/\tan \theta$. From the above expression, the smaller the clearance D, the smaller the thickness L of the polarization beam combining element **40** is made.

The incident light beams to the polarization beam combining element **40** (the half-wave plate **30a** and the glass plate **30b**) are collimated by the lens **20** and have a finite diameter. For this reason, if the clearance D is excessively small, the two incident light beams overlap each other. Meanwhile, it is assumed that the distance between the centers of the beams is defined as the clearance D. Then, part of the light beam from the output waveguide **1081** is incident on the half-wave plate **30a** and part of the light beam from the output waveguide **1091** is incident on the glass plate **30b** as unwanted leak light. For this reason, when the clearance D between the two light beams incident on the polarization beam combining element **40** is small, polarization crosstalk between two polarized waves in the outgoing light beam of the polarization beam combining element **40** is deteriorated.

Accordingly, in the optical modulator **1** of this embodiment, in order to prevent deterioration in polarization crosstalk, the lower limit value of the thickness L of the polarization beam combining element **40** is set such that the clearance D is not excessively small. Specifically, the thickness L of the polarization beam combining element **40** is set within a range in which polarization crosstalk is greater than the minimum value which is allowable as the transmission characteristic of the optical modulator **1**.

Although the embodiment of the invention has been described in detail with reference to the drawings, a specific configuration is not limited to that described above, and various design changes or the like may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Modifications will be described below.

The angles θ_1 and θ_2 between the output waveguides **1081** and **1091** and the normal to the end surface M of the LN substrate may be set such that the closer to the end surface M, the smaller the distance between the arms **108** and **109** (the output waveguides **1081** and **1091** do not intersect each other inside the LN substrate), the outgoing light beams from the arms **108** and **109** may intersect each other outside the modulator body **10**.

The half-wave plate **30a** and the glass plate **30b** may be bonded to the end surface M on the outgoing side of the modulator body **10**.

The rotation angle of the plane of polarization by the half-wave plate **30a** may be 45° , and instead of the glass plate **30b**, a half-wave plate which rotates the plane of polarization by 45° in an opposite direction to the rotation direction of the plane of polarization of the half-wave plate **30a** may be used, such that the planes of polarization of two light beams may be in a state of being relatively inclined at 90° by this half-wave plate and the half-wave plate **30a**.

Although the optical modulator **1** of FIG. **1** has the configuration of a collimating optical system by the lenses **20** and **50**, instead of the collimating optical system, the optical modulator **1** may have the configuration of a condensing optical system.

What is claimed is:

1. An optical modulator which makes polarized waves orthogonal to each other between light pulses corresponding to adjacent bits on a time axis, the optical modulator comprising:

first and second light modulation unit which are driven with the same modulation frequency;
an optical waveguide element which has a first waveguide through which a first modulated light beam by the first

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light modulation unit propagates and a second waveguide through which a second modulated light beam by the second light modulation unit propagates, the first waveguide being formed obliquely to an outgoing end surface, and the second waveguide being formed obliquely to both the first waveguide and the outgoing end surface;

a lens which makes parallel optical paths of the first modulated light beam outgoing from the first waveguide and the second modulated light beam outgoing from the second waveguide;

a phase delay element which applies a phase delay to at least one of the first and second modulated light beams;

a polarization beam rotating unit which rotates at least one polarized wave of the first and second modulated light beam to make the polarized waves orthogonal to each other between the two modulated light beams; and

a polarization beam combining element which is provided at the back of the lens, and combines the first modulated light beam and the second modulated light beam whose polarized waves are made orthogonal to each other, wherein the thickness of the phase delay element in the light propagation direction is set to a thickness at which a light pulse of the first modulated light beam and a light pulse of the second modulated light beam by a phase difference due to the phase delay element and a phase difference due to the polarization beam combining element are bit-interleaved.

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2. The optical modulator according to claim 1, wherein the phase delay element has a flat plate shape and is configured to adjust the inclination angle of the normal of the flat plate relative to the light propagation direction.
3. The optical modulator according to claim 1, wherein the thickness of the polarization beam combining element in the light propagation direction is set to be greater than a thickness corresponding to a minimum allowable value of polarization crosstalk on the combined beam between the first and second modulated light beams.
4. The optical modulator according to claim 1, further comprising:
 - a unit in which the optical waveguide element and the lens are fixed in a first housing; and
 - a unit in which the phase delay element, the polarization beam rotating unit, and the polarization beam combining element are fixed in a second housing along with an output optical fiber.
5. The optical modulator according to claim 1, further comprising:
 - a unit in which the optical waveguide element, the polarization beam rotating unit, and the phase delay element are fixed in a first housing; and
 - a unit in which the lens and the polarization beam combining element are fixed in a second housing along with an output optical fiber.

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